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A LETTER
TO THE RIGHT REV. LEWIS,
BY DIVINE PERMISSION,
LORD BISHOP OF NORWICH,
Bapt 12th
REQUESTING HIS LORDSHIP TO NAME
THE PRELATE,
TO WHOM HE REFERRED.
AS
“CONTENDING STRENUOUSLY
FOR THE GENERAL EXCELLENCE
OF OUR PRESENT AUTHORISED
TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE.”

THE INTERESTS OF VIRTUE AND TRUE RELIGION SUFFERED
YET MORE GRIEVOUSLY BY TWO MONSTROUS ERRORS,
WHICH WERE ALMOST UNIVERSALLY ADOPTED IN THIS
CENTURY—THE FIRST OF THESE MAXIMS WAS, THAT *it was an act of virtue to deceive and lye, when by that means the interests of the church might be promoted.* MOSHEIM. ECCL.
HIST. CENT. IV. PART 2. CH. 3.

IF ANY *high church* priest THINKS FIT TO ASSERT ANY THING,
THAT IN THE LEAST SERVES THE PURPOSE OF HIS CRAFT,
HE IS SURE OF CREDIT THEREIN, ON THE SCORE OF HIS
CHARACTER AND HIS *piety*, AND PERHAPS FOR HIS ASSU-
RANCE IN ASSERTING IT; EVEN THOUGH THE FALSHOOD
THEREOF MAY BE ALMOST DEMONSTRATED. HISTORICAL
AND CRITICAL ESSAY ON THE 39 ARTICLES. P. III.
FRANCKLIN 1724.

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A LETTER
TO THE
RIGHT REV. LEWIS,
LORD BISHOP OF NORWICH, &c.

My LORD,

UPON your primary visitation of the diocese of Norwich, you delivered the following sentiments, which may be quoted with the greater accuracy, as you afterwards obliged your clergy with printed copies of your charge.

' And after all the improvements in critical knowledge, and the varieties discovered in the manuscripts of the original text of scripture, and in the ancient versions, I am glad to see incomparably the ablest critic of the age contending strenuously for the general excellence of our present authorised translation; and recommending at the utmost, cautious corrections of particular passages. The prudence and judgment of this venerable prelate furnish an admirable lesson to the forwardness of young proficients in divinity.' p. 33.

The venerable prelate your lordship mentions, appeared, without doubt, to many, to be the truly excellent and much lamented bishop Lowth; nor is it easy to recollect another eminent person, who, in preference to him, could merit the title of *in-*

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comparably

comparably the ablest critic of the age. And indeed in the *Preliminary Dissertation*, prefixed to his *New Translation* of *Isaiah*, a passage occurs, which, from a certain similarity of turn and diction, might be imagined, by an incautious reader, the foundation of what your lordship asserted. But whether it could be in reality the authority you appealed to, I request the public to determine. It stands p. lxxii.

' I have ventured to call this a new translation,
 ' though much of our vulgar translation is retain-
 ' ed in it. As *the style* of that translation is not
 ' only *excellent* in itself, but has taken posseſſion
 ' of our ear, and of our taste, to have endeavoured
 ' to vary from it, with no other design
 ' than that of giving something new instead of it,
 ' would have been to disgust the reader, and to
 ' represent the ſenſe of the prophet in a more un-
 ' favourable manner: besides, that it is impos-
 ' ſible for a verbal translator to follow an ap-
 ' proved verbal translation which has gone before
 ' him, without frequently treading in the very
 ' footsteps of it. The most obvious, the proper-
 ' est, and perhaps the only terms which the lan-
 ' guage affords, are already occupied; and with-
 ' out going out of his way to find worse, he can-
 ' not avoid them. Every translator has taken
 ' this liberty with his predecessors: it is no more
 ' than the laws of translation admit; nor indeed
 ' than the necessity of the caſe requires. And as
 ' to the turn and modification of the ſentences,
 ' the translator, in this particular province of
 ' translation, is, I think, as much confined
 ' to the author's manner, as to his words: fo-
 ' that too great liberties taken, in varying either
 ' the expression or the composition, in order to
 ' give a new air to the whole, will be apt to have
 ' a very bad effect. *For these reasons*, whenever

it shall be thought proper to set forth the holy scriptures for the public use of our church to better advantage than as they appear in the present English translation, *the expediency of which grows every day more and more evident*, a revision, or *correction*, of that translation may perhaps be more adviseable, than to attempt an entirely new one. For *as to style and language*, it admits of but little improvement; *but in respect of the sense and accuracy of interpretation*, the improvements of which it is capable are *great and numberless.*

I need not point out to any one that this paragraph cannot possibly be the passage alluded to in your lordship's charge. Bishop Lowth's commendation of our vulgar translation goes no farther than the style and language; in which he did not advise an alteration, for reasons he has amply produced. With respect to the sense and accuracy of interpretation he held a very different sentiment. He was far from recommending, at the utmost, cautious corrections of particular passages. (Though I can hardly conceive that any revisal we can possibly request might not be called a correction of particular passages, however numerous; or that the task would be executed without the highest degree of caution.) 'The expediency, says he, of setting forth the scriptures for the public use of our church to better advantage than as they appear in the present English translation, grows every day more and more evident.' The improvements of which that translation is capable; and consequently the corrections he would have prescribed, 'are great and numberless.'

That such was the opinion of this eminent person, may be collected from his practice; from comparing the version of Isaiah offered by him

to the public, with that appointed to be read in churches. It appears also from another passage of his Preliminary Dissertation, p. lxix ; where, speaking of archbishop Secker's Annotations, he says, ‘ these valuable remains of that great and good man, will be of infinite service, whenever that necessary work, a new translation, or a revision of the present translation of the holy scriptures, for the use of our church, shall be undertaken.’ In perfect conformity with what we have seen, he tells us again, ‘ and here I can not but mention, that nothing could more effectually conduce to this end, than the exhibiting of the holy scriptures themselves to the people in a more advantageous and just light, by an accurate REVISAL of our vulgar translation by public authority. This hath often been represented ; AND, I HOPE, WILL NOT ALWAYS BE REPRESENTED IN VAIN.’ Visitation Sermon at Durham, 1758 ; apud Kennicott’s Remarks, Int. p. 12.

Be entreated, my lord, to consider the limits, within which, the enquiries of your clergy are necessarily confined ; especially where they cannot be carried on without recourse to modern and expensive publications. Perhaps some foreign critic, whose work is inaccessible to the majority of them, may have become the admirer and advocate of our established version ; as you describe your venerable prelate, in whose concurrence you rejoice, to be our contemporary only, without asserting that he is our countryman. If indeed he be an ornament to the English bench, it is hardly possible to conceive, that any individual of that order, except bishop Hurd, should, I will not say have *entertained*, but have *uttered* such a sentiment. He is, *they say*, an able critic : and if he be the

the writer in question, you would oblige us by referring to the volume and page of the work in which this criticism is delivered. That the late bishop of London was the author you intended to cite, can never for a moment be suspected. What he has declared to be his opinion, is so open and unambiguous, as not to be mistaken by you. And could your lordship, where the *goodness of your character* is less *confided in*, be thought capable of endeavouring to mislead, his publication is on many accounts so exquisite, that you would have affronted every curate in your diocese, by supposing the *pious fraud* might pass without detection. The friendly and honourable mention * he has made of you, must have secured him from your intentional misrepresentation in so delicate a point; lest by a jealousy inherent in literary characters, he had persuaded himself of your ingratitude, in imputing to him a sentiment he might regard as injurious to his fame. But I beg pardon for this suggestion. It puts you on a level with Vigilius, the notorious bishop of Tapsus; who hoped to protect his fooleries and his falsehoods from the contempt they deserved, by fathering them upon his superiors; infested the church with a certain pestilent farrago of blasphemous and uncharitable, impudent and absurd positions, under the name of Athanasius: and is with good reason imagined to have supported his fiction, by a no less shameful interpolation of the *three that bear record in heaven.*

* 'The learned Dr. Bagot, dean of Christ's Church, Oxford, in some observations on this place, which he has been so kind as to communicate to me, and which will appear in their proper light, when he himself shall give them to the public.' Note on Isaiah, chap. x. ver. 22, 23.
p. 81.

ven *. Be induced then, my lord, to comply with this request, and publicly avow by what authority, in concert with your own, you would damp the hope that for a long time has been excited, of an improved version of the Bible, into the English language. Should you withhold this information, it is probable that many persons will countenance a grievous error, and prosecute to perfection an undertaking disapproved by the more consummate wisdom of yourself, and the anonymous prelate you are glad to coincide with. They may be misled by men, who from the peculiar line of their studies, and their seeming proficiency in what they have applied to, have been imagined, perhaps without reason, not incompetent judges of the point in question ; and will meet with the greater attention, as they gave their suffrage in company with bishop Lowth. Your lordship may possibly have heard of the persons I shall mention : though their celebrity, it must be confessed, is so far inferior to your own, that it was perfectly needless for you to take notice of any one of them, as differing from you in opinion.

The first that will be produced is Dr. Kennicott, who published, if you remember, an edition of the

* 1 John v. 7. See Griesbach's N. T. in loc.—The Creed called the Athanasian, contradicts the opinion of Athanasius, B. Mordecai's letters, vol. 1. p. 218. 8vo. Taylor on creeds, p. 8. ‘ The damning sentences in St. Athanasius's creed (as we are made to subscribe to it) are false ; and also in a high degree presumptuous and schismatical.’ Chillingworth's letter to Sheldon. ‘ It seems to me very hard to put uncharitableness into the creed, and so to make it become as an article of faith ; though perhaps, this very thing was no faith of Athanasius.’ Bishop Taylor. In this light was it stated by Burnet to archbishop Tillotson, in 1694 ; who in answer says, ‘ The account given of Athanasius's creed seems to me no way satisfactory : I wish we were well rid of it.’ See Hints to the New Association, 1788, Ed. ii. p. 32.

the Old Testament, with some various readings. In his general Dissertation, which accompanies this work, he writes, *Quod denique ad nos metipos attinget, erant Anglis S. Scripturæ versiones, hodiernâ antiquiores. Ecquis vero Ecclesiæ Reformatæ fautor negabit, eos, qui versionibus Anglicanis usi sunt antiquioribus, veram habuisse Christianæ Religionis cognitionem? Eos, inquam, qui Religionem Vitâ exornarunt; & qui mortem ipsam, religionis causa, non gravatim subierunt! Novam tamen versionem, circa annum 1600, flagitabant nostrates; quæ & mox, bonis omnibus faventibus, confecta fuit. Jam vero, ætate hac nostra, nonne merito expectari potest accuratio interpretatio?* *Habemus certe linguae Hebraicæ Græcæque accuratiorem quam olim cognitionem. In re critica, ferventi studio, et felici admodum successu, per annos fere 200, operam impenderunt Viri eruditi. In promptu nunc sunt ditissima ex codd. manuscriptis subsidia; per quæ de vera lectione tutius judicari possit. Quidni itaque & nunc etiam boni omnes faverent, si hodiernam nostram versionem in melius recudi viderint? Sunt certe, & ii magni nominis viri, que versionem impense flagitant perfectorem; quorum tamen nemo non fatebitur—in ea, quam nunc habemus versione, satis omnino integratatis esse, ut de credendi & agendi normâ liquido constent omnia.* *Diss. Gen. p. 4. § 8. Imp. 1780.* “With respect to ourselves, the English possessed versions of the holy scripture, more ancient than the present. Yet what friend to the reformed church will deny, that they who used the older english translations, had a true knowledge of the christian religion? They, I mean, who adorned religion by their lives, and without reluctance, submitted to death in her cause. Our countrymen notwithstanding, about the year 1600, demanded a new translation; which was speedily accomplished,

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with the concurrence of all good men. And now, in this our age, may not a still more accurate translation with reason be expected? The Hebrew and Greek languages are assuredly understood by us with greater exactness than formerly. Learned men have, for almost 200 years, with zealous industry, and very flattering success, laboured in the critical department. The most plentiful succours from manuscript copies are now come to hand, by which we may, with greater safety form a judgment of the true reading. Why then should not all good men at this time also countenance the work, were they to see the version we at present use, reformed and improved? There are certainly persons, and they of great celebrity, who very earnestly demand a more perfect translation: yet every one of them will acknowledge that we now have, to be of sufficient integrity for the manifest discovery of whatever relates to the rule of faith and practice.

In his posthumous *Remarks on Select Passages in the old Testament*, the same author writes, (introduction p. 6.) ' During the long extent of years, (almost two whole centuries,) since this last translation was made, many *imperfections* and *errors* in it have been discovered by learned men. And several passages have been lately pointed out, in which the *older* English translations had better expressed the sense of the originals, both in the Old and in the New Testament. But notwithstanding these blemishes, and even mistakes, and though it is certain, that great improvements might be now made in translating the whole Bible, because the Hebrew and Greek languages have been much cultivated, and far better understood since the year 1600: yet we shall

‘ shall then only see the great *expediency* or ra-
 ‘ ther the *necessity*, of a more exact English Bible ;
 ‘ when we reflect that the *Hebrew Text* itself is now
 ‘ found to be wrong in many instances, some of
 ‘ which are of considerable consequence.’ After
 pointing out the necessity of a revisal, and the ad-
 vantages we possess for executing it, the author
 declares, ‘ all which circumstances—call for the
 ‘ most serious attention of our superiors to *a re-
 visal of our present translation.*

In the year 1772, twelve years before the de-
 livery of your charge, a work was printed at the
 Clarendon press, entitled, *Critical Remarks on the
 books of Job, Proverbs, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and
 Canticles*; by D. Durell, D.D. Principal of Hert-
 ford College, and Prebendary of Canterbury.
 This writer may have been known to you, as he
 had the honour of being most respectfully noticed
 by bishop Lowth, in his *Isaiah*, and of presiding
 over a society in the same University with your
 lordship. In the preface to his performance,
 p. vi. vii. he thus expresses himself. ‘ The chief
 ‘ excellency of this version,’ the version now in
 use, begun under the auspices of James I. ‘ con-
 ‘ sists in being a closer translation than any that
 ‘ had preceded ; in using the properest language
 ‘ for popular use, without affectation of sublimity,
 ‘ nor yet liable to the charge of vulgarity of ex-
 ‘ pression. It has likewise observed a due medium
 ‘ between the Genevese and Romish versions ;
 ‘ equally avoiding on the one hand, the scrupu-
 ‘ losity of the puritans—and on the other hand,
 ‘ the obscurity of the papists.—But notwith-
 ‘ standing these concessions in its favour, it cer-
 ‘ tainly does not exhibit, in many places, the
 ‘ sense of the text, so exactly as the version of
 £ 1599; (the quarto edition of the Geneva trans-
 lation

lation, printed by Barker;) and mistakes it besides, in an infinite number of instances. Frequently it expresses not the proper subject of the sentence: and adheres at other times so closely to the letter as to translate idioms. It arbitrarily gives new senses to words; omits or supposes them without necessity: these last are indeed distinguished by another character; but very unfavourable inferences, either to the genuineness of the text, or to the nature of the hebrew, must thence be drawn, by a reader unacquainted with that language. It is deficient in respect to the short explanatory notes in the margin, which abound in the last mentioned version. The words are at times so transposed as to create an *hyperbaton*; or are not sufficiently varied. And to sum up all, it has this fault in common with the other, that it may justly be questioned, whether any possible sense can, by fair interpretation, be deduced from the words in not a few places.* This version was published in the year 1611, and received considerable improvements - - -

But notwithstanding it must still be confessed that these and similar improvements can be deemed at best but superficial; forasmuch as they do not penetrate to the substance, or strike at the root of the evil. No individual, however, nor any society, can presume to go farther, till the great council of these realms shall think it expedient to delegate the important charge of a new translation to men of approved learning and judgment. In the mean time, hoping this very desirable period may not be far distant, I have

* Of all these defects, the author produces a multiplicity of examples from the 30 first chapters that occur in Job.

have thought it my duty to lay before the public
some part of the materials &c.

After mentioning the superior advantages we of this day enjoy, our author proceeds, ‘ These helps would indubitably not be contemned by the approved translator ; who, besides his more general acquaintance with universal science, would be free from the shackles, which not long since confined the opinions of all the learned, (not excepting the great *Pococke* himself,) in respect to the integrity of the Hebrew text.’ p. viii.

The longer your lordship delays this explanation, the more irremediable the evil you wish to counteract will be found. Since you declared your opinion, we have perused not only the *Remarks* of Dr. Kennicott cited above, but a *New Translation of Jeremiah and Lamentations*, and an *Attempt towards an Improved Version of the Twelve Minor Prophets*. The publication of these works implies the existence, if not the prevalence, of a sentiment decidedly adverse to you. Nor have the authors been backward in professing the result of their mature deliberation.

In the preface to his *Jeremiah*, Mr. Blayney says, ‘ but let me indulge a hope, that the time is not very far distant, when the task of bringing forward these materials to their proper use will not be left, as hitherto it hath been, altogether in the hands of a few well intentioned individuals, but will be undertaken on a more extensive plan by a select assembly of the most learned and judicious divines, commissioned by public authority, to examine into the state of the Hebrew text, to restore it as near as possible to its primitive purity, and to prepare from it a new translation of the scriptures in our own language for the public service. This has long been most devoutly wished

wished by many of the best friends to religion
 and our established church, who, though not
 insensible of the merit of our present version in
 common use, and justly believing it to be equal to
 the very best that is now extant in any language,
 ancient or modern, sorrowfully confess, that it
 is still far from being so perfect as it might and
 should be; that it often represents the errors of
 a faulty original with two exact a resemblance;
 whilst on the other hand it has mistaken the true
 sense of the Hebrew in not a few places; and
 sometimes substituted an interpretation so obscure
 and perplexed, that it becomes almost impossible
 to make out with it any sense at all. And if
 this be the case, shall we not be solicitous to ob-
 tain a remedy for such glaring imperfections?
 &c. p. ix.

Dr. Newcome, bishop of Waterford, in his preface to an Improved version of the minor prophets, tells us, p. xvi. ‘ One design of engaging in the present arduous province, was to recommend and, in a small degree, to facilitate, an improved English version of the scriptures; than which nothing could be more beneficial to the cause of religion, or more honourable to the reign and age in which it was patronised and executed. The reasons for its expediency, are, the mistakes, imperfections, and many invincible obscurities of our present version; the accession of various helps since the execution of that work; the advanced state of learning; and our emancipation from slavery to the Masoretic points, and to the Hebrew text as absolutely uncorrupt.’ I am informed also that Dr. White, Laudian professor of Arabic in the university of Oxford, has employed every argument, which can be suggested by a sound judgement, and a well guided zeal, in

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a sermon, to recommend the revision of our present version of the Bible. This I learn from ‘Observations &c.’ by John Symonds, LL.D.; a work, which, with some others, seems to hint, that the enlightened among the laity may not have patience to wait for ever the good pleasure and decision of the clerical order, in a matter of such vast importance to all.

These, my lord, are persons, you must be well aware, whose opinion, especially as it agrees with that of bishop Lowth, will have its weight with (perhaps) an undiscerning public; and will not be esteemed in general to originate in *the forwardness of young proficients in divinity*. Far from acquiescing in *the general excellence of our present authorised translation*, they have expressed themselves desirous of seeing a work accomplished, which might be called an entire revisal, if not a new version of the holy scriptures. Should the zeal of the nation be once awakened according to their prescription, it may carry men to atchieve much more than can be implied in the obvious meaning of *a cautious correction of particular passages*. To prevent the *licentious profanation* that may arise from undertaking a new translation of the Bible and withdrawing our implicit deference from that to which we have *from our cradle* been accustomed, it becomes your lordship to exhibit, if not the reasons on which your judgment is founded, at least the individual by whom it is patronised; and to explain at your ensuing visitation, what you left in obscurity at your first. The opportunity that will then be given you, is the cause of your being at this particular season addressed, with all due respect and humility, by your lordship’s most obedient,

TERRÆ FILIUS.

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P O S T S C R I P T.

AS my present address to your lordship has abounded with extracts from the works of others, I will take the liberty of subjoining one, by way of postscript, on a different subject, which does equal honour to yourself, and to the understanding and integrity of the *very great* author from whom it is taken. At your next visitation you will undoubtedly administer the sacred rite of confirmation. And if any sentiment of mine be worth adopting, I could wish copies of the quotation to be circulated in every parish through the diocese, for the emolument of a most worthy set of men, peculiar objects of your lordship's *humanity*—the officers of the spiritual court—that the principal design of the holy ceremony may be more fully comprehended; and that the catechumens may know beforehand their happiness, in being favoured with a kind of *Autoψια*, or *beatific vision*.

It was observed by one of the wisest heathens, that if virtue could assume a bodily form, so lovely would be its appearance, that every one would be captivated with it. But beautiful as imagination may conceive the form of mere virtue to be, was it not your lot to behold a much more striking, a much more venerable, and more captivating sight? Was it not your happy privilege to behold piety and devotion embodied * as it were

* A most fortunate comparison, borrowed from the oriental philosophy (of which the orthodox have ever been excessively fond, and are constantly introducing it into their systems of Christianity) representing his lordship as a superior intelligence, a preexistent spirit incarnate, and now perhaps in a state of *humiliation*!

• were in a human form ? Did you not behold, if
 • I may so express myself the very beauty of holiness * ? Can you ever recall to your minds the
 • solemn scene which passed in yon sacred place †
 • (and let me beseech you frequently to recall it to
 • your minds, let me intreat you never to suffer it
 • to be blotted out of your memory, nor the influence of it to be erased from your hearts) can you,
 • I say, ever recall this scene to your remembrance,
 • and nor feel the most profound reverence and most fervent affection for genuine piety and true devotion ? Can you think of their winning amiableness and attractive graces, without wishing, without imploring heaven, that the same amiable spirit may sanctify every action of your lives, every thought of your hearts, and every word that proceedeth out of your mouths ? After having the happiness of beholding the shining light of such an example ‡, should you notwithstanding, break your oaths, how complicated would be

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* The peculiar propriety with which this expression is applied, appears from 2 Chron. xx. 21. where it is of the same import with *Jehovab*. The University of Oxford, improving upon John xvii. 11. addressed archbishop Laud, whom a certain prelate of these days proposes to himself as a model for imitation, by the title of *Most holy Father*. Heylin, p. 297. And upon the opening their theatre, called its founder, Abp. Sheldon, ‘ their creator and redeemer, for not only having built a theatre for the act, but, which is more, delivered the blessed Virgin from being so profaned for the future.’ The act was no more to be kept in St. Mary’s Church. Neale. Puritans, ii. 669. 4to. These are Dr. C—’s authorities.

† ‘ The chancel, which is shut up from the body of the church.’ οξω βεβηλοι.

‡ The sanctity of the diocesan is Dr. Cooper’s *One Great Argument*, by which he recommends a holy life. And yet the doctor does not want bread. It has indeed been reported, that, if he did,

Mancipiis locuples eget æris Cappadocum Rex.

‘ the crime ! How aggravated the punishment !
‘ Then would you render vain the *fervent prayer*
‘ *of the righteous man* ; and though the apostle af-
‘ sures us *that it availeth much*, yet all that fervor
‘ with which he petitioned the throne of grace on
‘ your behalf, all that affectionate zeal with which
‘ he poured out his benediction on your heads,
‘ could profit you nothing, but on the contrary,
‘ only add to your condemnation.’ *Address to per-*
sions after Confirmation, by Samuel Cooper, D.D.
Minister of Great Yarmouth. Printed 1783.

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